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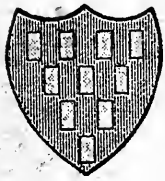
ROGER CONANT

IN AMERICA
AS GOVERNOR
and CITIZEN



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Mrs. Sarah S. Bartlet

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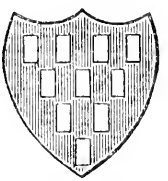


AN HISTORICAL ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT

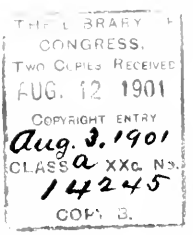
The Conant Family Reunion

Hotel Vendome, Boston, June 13th, 1901

BY

MRS. SARAH S. BARTLET

617 Warren St., Roxbury, Mass.



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Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:—

It is my pleasing duty on this notable occasion to present for your consideration the honored colonist, first governor and citizen, Roger Conant.

All historians agree that his life was an open book, from which emanated only the best and purest motives; acts which resulted in the greatest good to his fellow-men and to this country. Most assuredly do we owe to his noble traits and singleness of purpose, coupled with his wise judgment, the foundation of our beloved Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

In July, 1623, we find Roger Conant domiciled with the Plymouth Colony, having arrived there it is supposed in the good ship Ann, with his wife Sarah, who was the daughter of a merchant residing near his native town of East Budleigh, and their eldest son Caleb, about a year old, together with his brother Christopher. Rev. Mr. Lyford and John Oldham also came at the same time. They were all "particulars"; that is, they paid their own expenses over to this country, while the "generals," as they were designated, came over at the expense of the Company of Adventurers in London.

Roger Conant did not remain long with the Plymouth Colony, owing to the differences of religious belief between himself and the Pilgrim Fathers. They were Separatists, and he was a Nonconformist or Puritan, remaining loyal to the established Church of the mother country.

After a short time Rev. Mr. Lyford and John Oldham incensed the Pilgrims by their opposition to the Pilgrim form of worship which had been adopted in the Colony, and they removed to Nantasket, whither Roger Conant soon followed them; but he was not expelled with them from the Plymouth Colony, as has been erroneously stated. It was probably at this time that he made use of the island in Boston Harbor, and which for that reason was first called Conant's Island, but which is now known as Governor's Island, it having been granted to Governor Winthrop upon his agreeing to plant a vineyard and orchard upon it.

Upon the representations of several navigators, among them Capt. John Smith, who had visited the coast in 1614, a company was formed in London for the purpose of securing and trading in the abundant quantity of fish said to abound in these waters. In the fall of 1623 or '24 a small number of men with their families and supplies were sent over and located at a spot near what is now called Stage Head, in Gloucester. This was a barren, rocky place on the coast, illy suited for

a habitation or for planting, on a rocky point projecting into the sea. In the spring more men, provisions and some cattle were sent over in season for the spring fishing. The materials for a house for the planters' use were sent, stages were erected for drying fish, and vats were dug for the manufacture of salt. At this time this branch of industry had engaged the attention of capitalists and others, many vessels being sent here to engage in this trade. The company which made this venture was called the Dorchester Company, and was composed of men of all ranks, including most influential men who hoped for great returns from this investment, for Capt. John Smith had said, "Let not the meanness of the word *fish* distate you, for it will be offered as good gold as comes from the mines, with less hazard and charge and more facility."

The settlement received the name of the Cape Ann Plantation, the cape being so called in honor of Queen Ann of Denmark, the Royal Consort of King James, and mother of Charles I, under whom the patent to Capt. John Smith had been granted in 1614, when he took possession of this region. Most of the prominent members of the Plantation were men whose homes were in the vicinity of Dorchester, England. The Dorchester Company appointed Mr. Thomas Gardner overseer of the Plantation, and Mr. John Tilly was given charge of the fisheries. One of the principal men of this settlement was Mr. John Woodbury, of Somersetshire, England. These men labored hard for the success of the venture in the face of adverse circumstances; the principal ones being an untimely scarcity of fish, the price received for which at the same time declined, some of the crews were poorly chosen, and various mishaps befell the vessels, having far to go to secure the fish. Then, too, the rocky, sandy soil did not yield to cultivation. After nearly a year of brave struggle this little colony attracted the notice of Rev. John White, in charge of Trinity Parish, Dorchester, in Dorset, England, and who was afterwards a member of the Assembly that framed the Westminster Catechism. He was strongly impressed with the importance that could come from such a nucleus in building up a successful colony, and he exerted himself very greatly to succor this little band. After consultation with the Dorchester Company he received assurance that more men, money and cattle would be forthcoming. He looked about for a leader suitable to take charge of the colony under these changed and more promising conditions. His attention was directed to Roger Conant, who at this time, you will remember, was a member of the Nantasket Colony. Rev. Mr. White being well satisfied that this Roger Conant was a "pious, sober and prudent gentleman," Mr. Humphreys, Treasurer of the joint adventurers, was empowered to write Mr. Conant in their name stating that "they had chosen him to be their

Governor in that place, and would commit unto him all their affairs, fishing as well as planting." Accordingly Governor Conant accepted this trust and removed to Cape Ann with his family, accompanied by Rev. Mr. Lyford, whom he made pastor of the settlement according to the established Church of England, which form of worship continued until the arrival of Governor Endicott. John Oldham, the successful trader with the Indians, also accompanied him for trading purposes.

New hope was infused into the Plantation with the advent of Governor Conant. The form of government under their patent was republican, very liberal and with suitable allegiance to England, with which they were strongly connected by social and political ties. This little colony, so apart in its location from others in the vast wilderness, adopted, under the patent, specific laws and rules for their own special and peculiar colony, that suggested themselves to the calm, clear judgment of Governor Conant, ably assisted by the tact and ability of such men as Thomas Gardner, John Woodbury, John Tilly and others. Self-government, of course, largely entered into such a compact, which, under the circumstances, would necessarily be strictly kept by the conscientious and ignored by the careless. These colonists were chiefly God-fearing adherents of the Church, and their faith in God was unlimited, and their courage indomitable. It is impossible, we find, in our day to collect one hundred men who are in perfect accord on any important matter; different minds asserting different views in essentials, as well as in non-essentials. This condition must have obtained in those early days, but throughout all we see Governor Conant's wise and just governing hand while receiving the affectionate respect due from his little band. Particularly is this evidenced on the memorable occasion when Capt. Myles Standish, of the Plymouth Colony, appeared with a few men and demanded the fishing stages at Cape Ann, which the Plymouth Colony claimed had been built by them prior to the settlement there. The crews of the vessels and the fishermen needed but a sign to attack the doughty Capt. Myles Standish, whose hasty words had so incensed them. Governor Conant's conduct poured oil upon the troubled waters when he counseled that the men under Capt. Myles Standish be allowed to remove the fishing stages, as new ones could more easily be built than to have disgraceful words and possible bloodshed ensue. The wisdom of his advice was seen and speedily followed, and Captain Standish departed with his prize. This was the only disturbance recorded, and this, it may be seen, came about through no fault of the settlers themselves. However, at the end of the year other causes for discouragement arose; fishing and all pertaining to it had grown distasteful to many. The calling itself was not unworthy, being the Apostles' own,

and money obtained therefrom was counted in as good repute as the gold-seekers now obtain from Australia or Alaska; but among the more humble workers a discordant element obtained, who tired of the life and refused to prosecute the industry under such adverse conditions, many of whom resolved to return to England, and took advantage of the Company's offer to defray all expenses of the return voyage, besides receiving their wages to date. About a year previous to this period Governor Conant, who was as dissatisfied with the location and business as were those connected with him, had journeyed four or five leagues to the southwest, where he had been much attracted by the good location and agricultural advantages of a fruitful neck of land projecting into the sea, and promising great advantages. In glowing words he told of the "grass thick and long and very high, growing wildly," with strawberries everywhere, wild roses, brilliant and fragrant wild flowers, and scented herbs, raspberries, plums, grapes, and other tempting wild fruits in profusion. He pictured this attractive spot with its brooks and winding streams to his faithful adherents, and it was agreed to remove to this place, now that nothing was to be gained by remaining where they were. Accordingly in 1626 he, with his faithful friends and followers, removed with all their worldly goods, including cattle, etc., to this attractive location. This little band, after the departure of the dissatisfied fishermen, consisted of Rev. Mr. Lyford, Thomas Gardner, John Woodbury, Peter Palfry, John Balch, and others, who were all greatly attached to their leader and governor.

It is supposed that they landed not far from the foot of what is now Elm Street in Salem. Here in this attractive region they found a small band of friendly Indians who had been much depopulated by a recent epidemic, and who bade them welcome to Naumkeag. The Puritan divines found a similarity in the name Naumkeag to the Hebrew words Nahum Keike, meaning "bosom of consolation"—Nahum meaning comfort and Keike a haven. Mather later interpreted it "haven of peace"; and such did it indeed seem to this little company. The Indians had cleared a large space of ground and had raised much Indian corn. Berries and wild fruits were very abundant, so that the spirits of the little company rose in anticipation of the fruits of the earth that were to be raised in such plentiful abundance. Sites for their homes were selected on a height of land between the North and South rivers, at a little distance from each other, with fields and pastures in common; and here they lived happily for a time, busy and contented. But alas! the spirit of discontent invaded this peaceful retreat; Rev. Mr. Lyford, John Oldham and others, had visited the more fruitful region and the warmer climate of the Virginia Colony, and they had decided to remove thither. Argu-

ment upon argument was used to induce Roger Conant and the members of the Salem Colony, many of whom favored the project, to come with them. Roger Conant earnestly desired to do so, but his sense of honor at the thought of thus deserting his position of trust, made him deaf to all entreaties. Rev. John White learning of the proposed plan to weaken the number of this little colony, again came to the rescue and counseled that one of their number be sent to the Company in England to represent the condition of the colony. The choice fell upon John Woodbury, as in every way worthy to present the needs and advantages of sending assistance, and to secure a new patent before any one else could do so. Mr. Woodbury departed on his mission, and returned in June, 1628, bringing word of promised aid and of a new patent shortly to be granted. After John Woodbury's departure for this country, another party, controlled largely by Matthew Craddock, afterwards Governor Craddock of Massachusetts, gained control of the new patent, and John Endicott was made governor; he was sent over with fifty more colonists to supersede Governor Conant.

Of this last, Governor Conant was of course ignorant, and when he saw a goodly ship entering the harbor, he saw, as he supposed, the aid which he had been given reason to expect. Imagine, if you can, his feelings when he received information that after being Governor of the colony through that trying three years of struggle and adversity, that he was to be superseded by a new Governor, who now appeared in the person of Governor Endicott, prepared to claim the title and all the prerogatives of governorship. The Old Planters, firm adherents of Roger Conant, openly rebelled against his being ousted from his important office in that way, and wished to see their leader contest the validity of Governor Endicott's claim. But Roger Conant's calm, clear judgment satisfied him that the charter held by Governor Endicott, under the new régime, was well authenticated, and that any opposition made now, at this distance from the headquarters of the Company, would be worse than useless. Accordingly, in a courteous, Christian spirit, he strove by his words and bearing to recognize the authority vested in Governor Endicott. He gave him all the assistance possible, and counseled his adherents to do the same. But the Old Planters for several months, or the Cape Ann Planters, as they were commonly called, remained apart in spirit from the new-comers, and were greatly dissatisfied with the changed state of affairs. They realized that Governor Endicott had no right to make laws for them, who held lands according to a previous charter.

The Company in England were informed of the condition of affairs by Governor Endicott, and in a letter dated April 17, 1629, the treasurer of the Dorchester Company writes that "it is proposed to allow

the Old Planters to become members of the corporation, hold the lands already allotted to them, and also to receive still further grants, which were to be equal to the grants allotted to the adventurers who had put £50 into the Company (only a few of the adventurers had put in a larger sum)." They were also to have a reduction on goods transported in the Company's vessels; the privilege of cultivating tobacco, which was denied the other colonists; and lastly they were permitted to elect two of their number as members of the Council. These privileges were granted. Still this was a trying time for Roger Conant and the Old Planters. He had indeed just cause for complaint. It needed but a word from him to induce them to join the Virginia Colony, where they would have been heartily welcomed, which was again being urged that they should do, but his uprightness and self-denial are plainly seen. He concealed his own sense of injustice, preferring to sacrifice his personal interests for the public good, thus securing peace and harmony. His success, we have seen, in attracting the notice of influential persons in England to the advantage of establishing a colony here was most remarkable, and but for him we know that the Colony at Cape Ann would have been given up after its first year of trial and adversity. The esteem in which he was held by Rev. John White, the noted divine, spoke volumes in his favor, as did also the influence of Sir Henry Russell, the patron of his brother John, the ecclesiastic.

It has been contended by a few that he was not the first governor of Massachusetts; but Roger Conant is fully entitled to that honor, for the Colony of which he was the first governor made the first permanent settlement in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and there established a legal form of government, from which the Massachusetts Bay Colony sprung. Roger Conant was without doubt the first and only governor under the Cape Ann patent, as Governor Endicott was the first governor under the second or Massachusetts charter.

It would be impossible to find a greater disparity between the dispositions of the two men than that presented by the first two governors of Massachusetts Bay Colony. Governor Conant was of a mild, gentle, unselfish, quiet nature, with a strong and high moral courage governed by a faith in the justice and providence of God that nothing could dim. "He could obey like a true soldier, or command like a true general." Governor Endicott was the opposite of Governor Conant, quick, impetuous, unyielding, hasty, intolerant of others' religious views, and apt to be one-sided in his judgments. Besides strict honesty they had little else in common.

There is no doubt but that the new colonists infused new life into the little Colony, and in a short time there were evident signs of pros-

perity on every side. About each dwelling was to be found a patch of Indian corn, but the fields were common fields,—that is, cultivated in common. They had been made most prolific by the use of fish as a fertilizer, and yielded an abundance of vegetables of many sorts. The pastures were also used in common for pasturing the sheep and cattle. It might almost have been a "Province of Arcadia," for in the early morning, at the herdsman's call, could be seen the cattle, sheep and goats to leave their barns and stalls and come out into the broad path leading through the sunlit woods under the great arching trees of the forest to the common meadows beyond, to retrace their steps to the abiding places of their owners as the sun went down.

Roger Conant built the first house in Salem. It stood, it is supposed, on Essex Street, on the site nearly opposite the Market in Derby Square.

The materials for the large house used by the Cape Ann Planters at Cape Ann, was removed to Salem, for the use of Governor Endicott, but there is now some doubt about its location.

Roger Conant was many times called to positions of honor and importance by his associates; he having received an unusually good education for those early times was well fitted for the highest positions of trust and honor. He was admitted a freeman, May 18, 1631.

At a Court held at Boston, 1632, it was ordered that there should be two persons chosen from each plantation to confer with the Court about raising a general stock for the purposes of trade. Roger Conant and Peter Palfry were thus chosen.

In November, 1632, he was appointed with others to "sett down the bounds between Dorchester and Roxbury." Also to "sett off" a portion of land in Saugus to John Humphrey. Down to the year 1634 the freemen had intrusted the transaction of nearly all business to the Court of Assistants, but in that year they elected twenty-four of their own number as deputies to the General Court, which met at Boston, May 14. This was the second Representative Assembly which met in this country, that of Virginia being the first. Roger Conant was one of the deputies from Salem, and thus assisted in laying the foundation of that form of government which is to-day our best inheritance.

In 1636 he was among those elected to examine and mark all canoes belonging in Salem, of which every householder owned several. As the forests for any distance were practically unexplored, the water was the highway of communication between neighboring settlements.

The following year he was foreman of the Jury of Trials.

In 1637 he, with Mr. William Hathorn, was appointed by the General Court to be one of the Justices of the Quarterly Court at Salem. This was the district now embraced in Essex County. The Book of

Grants for the 11th of September, 1637, in the Town Records of Salem, is in his handwriting. He was one of the committee chosen to certify to the bounds between Salem and Saugus. In 1639 a new meeting-house was built. A committee of five, of which Roger Conant was one, was appointed. Both he and his wife were among the original members, and in 1637 they signed the renewed covenant. Rev. Hugh Peters was the pastor.

He was a member of the Grand Jury in 1642.

In 1643 he was one of a committee to settle the bounds between Salem and Ipswich. In 1644 he surveyed Wenham and laid out the highways. In 1644 he was one of a Jury of Trials. In 1645 he was one of the tax assessors. In 1646 and 1655 he was again on the Grand Jury and Jury of Trials.

The office of selectman, or one of the "eleven men," as it was at that time called, was one of great honor in those days; only the most honorable men were thus chosen. Roger Conant held this office eleven years.

In those early days clergymen occupied a very high position in the Colony, great deference being paid to them in social matters as well as in spiritual ones. It is a matter of record that only the most worthy men of the Colony were received by them on an equality. We find in 1663 that Roger Conant, Rev. John Higginson and Capt. Thomas Lothrop, who was afterwards slain at Bloody Brook, were delegated to the ordination of Rev. Antipas Newman, at Wenham. Rev. Antipas Newman married a daughter of Governor Winthrop. Thus it may be seen that Roger Conant's social position was of the highest. He was continually called upon to witness deeds and wills. In 1637 he removed to the mouth of Bass River, on the Cape Ann side, and there formed a new settlement, which is now comprised within the limits of the town of Beverly. He built his house on an Indian pathway leading to the sea. It is supposed that this house stood on the east side of Cabot Street near Balch Street.

On February 10, 1649 or '50, the residents of Beverly finding it inconvenient to attend religious services at Salem, petitioned that they be allowed to have preaching among themselves. They were shortly after allowed this privilege, but they did not remove their connection from the church at Salem until 1665, when they were organized as a separate religious body, with Rev. John Hale as their pastor. To this day the name of Roger Conant may be found first on the list of members. He was one of a committee to fix Mr. Hale's salary.

In 1668 the locality received the name of Beverly. But the name of Beverly was repugnant to Roger Conant. A petition drawn up by him and signed by thirty-four of his townsmen is in the Massachusetts

Archives at the State House in this city, in which he states his objections to the name. "First, because Beverly has been nicknamed 'Beggarly,' because that the number of its inhabitants is so small." He also desired to spend his declining years in a town which bore the name of another town so dear to him,—Budleigh in his native land. He gives as a reason for presuming to make the request the service "that he as an humble instrument under God has been in establishing the Colony, when in the infancy thereof, it was in great hassard of being deserted. I was the means through grace assisting me to stop the flight of those few that then were here with me, and that by my utter denial, to goe away with them who would have gone either for England or mostly for Virginia but thereupon staid to the hassard of our lives."

His petition was not granted, but instead two hundred acres of land were granted to him at that time. A grant of twenty acres had already been given to his son Roger, being the first child born in the settlement. The amount of land held by him must have been considerable in addition to that acquired by purchase.

In 1635-36 Roger Conant, John Woodbury, Peter Palfry, John Balch and Captain Trask received each two hundred acres apiece lying at the head of Bass River.

In 1637 he held forty-four acres in the vicinity of Salem Village.

On June 17, 1671, the General Court granted two hundred acres in consideration of his being "a very ancient planter."

In December, 1667, he divided among his sons, Lot, Roger and Exercise, the greater part of his property, preferring to dispose of it during his lifetime, reserving the use of a part of his estate during his lifetime.

The records of those early days are necessarily very incomplete, and much data in regard to Roger Conant's family has been unfortunately not preserved. His wife was known to be living in 1666, but as she is not mentioned in his will, she, without doubt, had died before that time.

It is believed that only seven of the children of Roger and Sarah Horton Conant lived to maturity, for in the Book of Grants, written about 1640, it is recorded that the family of Roger Conant comprised nine persons.

Roger Conant's death occurred in the eighty-eighth year of his age. The place of his burial is unfortunately not known, but he needs no headstone nor towering granite shaft to keep his memory green in the hearts of his descendants.

The Conant family has descended to the present time mainly through Roger's sons, Lot and Exercise. His sons Roger and Joshua have comparatively few descendants. Lot was the ancestor of the Beverly branch, extending to Ipswich. Exercise removed to Boston; his de-

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scendants are to-day to be found largely in Connecticut and Rhode Island. There is hardly a State in the Union but that there the honored name is proudly borne by the descendants of Roger Conant; the home of one talented member of the family being so far away as Northern Canada. Nearly every family of Conants in each generation has been the happy possessor of a son bearing the name of Roger; such sons being always the objects of much goodly counsel to be worthy bearers of the honored name.

A dozen towns, more or less, bearing the illustrious name of Conant are scattered through the United States. Many streets throughout the country bear the name of Conant; so named in honor of Roger Conant or some of his worthy descendants. In Salem, not far from Beverly Bridge, we find a Conant Street, thus named in his honor; and in Beverly his name is also perpetuated by another street called Conant Street.

Throughout all generations the loyalty and bravery inherited from our revered ancestor have been most conspicuous, as is here shown by the honorable military list which records the brave heroes bearing the name of Conant.

In King Philip's Wars there were two; in French Wars, five; in the Revolutionary War, eighty; in the War of 1812, ten; in the Mexican War, one; in the War of the Rebellion, seventy-four.

Science, art and literature have been most worthily represented by many brilliant members of our worthy family, the medical profession alone furnishing a score or more of illustrious names here in New England at the present time.

This account would be incomplete without a passing reference to the strict integrity and high moral worth of the many men and women of our day who are connected with our beloved family: men who are honored in business, and women who shine with true worth, alike in our higher educational institutions and within the happy home circle.

Many descendants there are to-day, and have been in the generations that are past, who have borne the name most worthily, and who have attained the highest positions of honor in our land through their own merits and attainments, ever keeping before them the loyalty and fidelity of their worthy ancestor.

Let us all, therefore, henceforth give all honor and praise due to one whose honored name, and whose integrity as its *first Governor*, laid the foundation of our honored Commonwealth.

We who here to-day are of kindred blood and name in common, bound together by "ties as strong as iron though light as air," do one and all revere the memory of our most worthy ancestor, Roger Conant.

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